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He stayed as long as he pleased and kept his preachers in a place as long as he desired. Circumstances made their stay in one charge necessarily brief. There was no time limit in the Methodist Church of this country at the beginning. Bishop Asbury influenced the General Conference of 1804 to vote a limit of two years on the pastoral term of any man in a single charge. The limit applied only to pastors. Secretaries, agents, editors, presidents or professors of colleges were exempt.

This limit was retained for sixty years, when, at the General Conference of 1864, it was moved up to three years, where it remained till the Conference of 1888, when it was extended to five years. We believe it would be an advantage to the Church if the time limit were entirely removed. The change from two to three and then to five years has not destroyed the itineracy as the opponents of the change maintained, nor do we think that a removal of the limit would destroy it. In the earlier history of this country, when the population was scattered and migratory missionary labor seemed to be almost the sole need, and the pioneer ministers adjusted themselves to the need with marvellous facility, the time limit acted as a strong arm of evangelistic power. Now that the population is more settled and its rush to the cities is so impetuous, the work of building up the Church and adjusting it to the changed social conditions is as imperative as gathering the people into the kingdom, and a longer term in the great cities is a necessity. A longer term would be good for the minister. It would compel increased diligence in reading, study and pulpit preparation. It would enable him to lay deeper and broader plans and build more substantial and artistic superstructures. The dead line is where a minister ceases to do new work, though he be but thirty years of age. The change would give the Methodist ministers the opportunity that those of other denominations have of fastening themselves to the local institutions of education, benevolence, and reform.

The lengthening of the term would dignify the regular pastorate which under the present system is too often discounted. The removal of the limit would be good for the churches, permitting a short or a long term as the people might desire or Providence indicate. Dr. J. M. Buckley, in an editorial in the *Christian Advocate* of April 2, makes a compromise proposition which is likely to be adopted by the Conference at Cleveland. It is as follows: "When a Quarterly Conference, without debate in the absence of the pastor, by ballot, shall by a three-fourths vote of the entire membership of the Quarterly Conference assigning the conditions of the pastorate as the ground for the necessity, request the reappointment of the pastor whose limit is about to expire, the Bishop presiding at the next Conference may return such pastor for another year, without regard to the number of years he may have served already in the charge." Dr. Butts, President of Drew Theological Seminary, suggests as an amendment to the proposition that in these exceptional cases only five additional years of service be allowed or ten years in all.

F. C. IGLEHART.

THE AGRICULTURAL PROBLEM.

NO INTELLIGENT man who has had opportunities for observation can doubt that the "Agricultural Problem" is the most vital in American politics to-day, though it has been thrust aside by issues that are at most only corollaries to the main proposition.

The situation is anomalous and unparalleled. The country has had

profound peace for thirty years. There have been no famines. In fact, this period has been one of wonderful productiveness. Yet every year the farmers as a class have become poorer. Every year it has been found more difficult for them to meet their obligations. The farmer goes in debt for the things necessary to raise a crop, and when the day of settlement arrives the price of farm products has gone down, and relatively money is dearer.

The statement is frequently heard that the farmer is not progressive, that he should buy machinery and fertilizers, and curtail living expenses. It is not worth while to enter into a discussion relative to such statements. In part they are true ; as a rule they are false.

The American farmer is progressive; he is intelligent; he is frugal. He is a hard worker, and the pinched and careworn face of his wife shows that she bears her burden. They are a brave and hopeful couple, but they are beginning to despair. And when they do the institutions of our Republic will topple down upon us, a mass of shapeless ruins.

Bacon says: "Let States that aim at greatness take heed how their nobility and gentlemen do multiply too fast; for that maketh the common subject grow to be a peasant and a base swine, driven out of heart, and, in effect, but a gentleman's laborer." Again, he says: "Neither will it be, that a people overlaid with taxes should ever become valiant and martial," and he draws the conclusion that "no people overcharged with tribute is fit for empire."

The materialistic reasoners of the present day decry the lessons of history. They point to the wonderful progress of this century and say: "A new era has dawned; let our children study the practical arts and sciences taught in our technical schools and learn to make a living." Again we have a grain of truth mixed with much sophistry. We are departing from the profound methods of our ancestors. And nations like men are slow to profit by the experience of others.

It is not necessary to insist upon the importance of the farming interests of the country; or to point out to the effect that the farmers' prosperity or decay has upon all other callings and upon the moral, social and intellectual development of the country. Draper shows how the first awakening of mind took place in those countries where the farming classes were most prosperous, and were enabled to make a living with the least amount of drudgery. Egypt in the old world, and Peru and Mexico in the new, furnish examples. Even a loose reader of history will be struck with the elasticity and energy the husbandman has shown since we have authentic accounts of human events. Whenever the land has been relieved of its burdens, whenever the farmer has been made to bear, either directly or indirectly, only his just proportion of the load of taxation, in how short a time has he gathered his strength and made the face of nature to blossom as the rose and to smile in prosperous abundance. Witness France when Napoleon had a breathing spell from his wars; witness Spain after the Moorish conquest. The history of any country will bear similar testimony.

The rule has been that young countries are prosperous before wealth flows into great reservoirs, and power and expenditures increase until agriculture is oppressed. Then decay begins. All sorts of nostrums are proposed, but the malady is deadly unless the knife is applied to the cancerous root.

Some eighteen hundred years ago Plutarch wrote: "It was well and truly said that the first destroyer of the liberties of a people is he who first gives them bounties and largesses." He was a great student of history, and at

this time saw Rome at the pinnacle of her glory start slowly on her descent to the depths of degradation. Great minds were at work in Rome, some trying honestly to solve mighty political problems, others—demagogues on the grandest scale the world has seen—attempting to secure power and wealth by pandering to the rabble. Wheat was being distributed free to the populace to keep them quiet, great shows were being displayed to please them. The Emperor and two thousand rich patricians owned the known world. Of the 110,000,000 Roman subjects, 60,000,000 were literally slaves. Agriculture had reached or was fast approaching its lowest ebb. It was being claimed that the soil of Italy was worn out past redemption, and learned treatises were being written on this subject. Columella felt called upon to controvert a theory that both the air and land had lost their fertilizing qualities. Cicero, Cato, Varro and many other eminent Romans wrote on this subject, and attempted to revive interest in agriculture, which was no longer profitable and consequently neglected. A few years previous Marius had ordered a re-allotment of land, to appease the popular clamor, and had given sixteen acres to each individual. Yet there was no relief.

Five hundred years later Theodoric, the Ostrogoth, overran Italy, struck the shackles of law from the hands of the farmer, and a period of great prosperity followed. Gibbon says, a purse was safe upon the public highway, wine sometimes sold as low as a cent and a half a gallon, and wheat was worth sixteen and a half cents a bushel. And Italy is to-day one of the fertile countries of the world. Rome also tried her hand on fiat money and made a failure. In the declining days of the empire it was thought that a more abundant circulating medium was the thing most needful. Consequently coins were debased by a copper alloy until little of the original metal was left. It had the Roman stamp upon it and was money, but it did not remedy the evil. It is interesting to recall in this connection the estimate of Herodotus that in the reign of Darius, King of Persia, some 2,400 years ago, gold was worth thirteen times more than silver. Also that in the year 1,700 A. D., gold was worth about fifteen times more than silver. Of late years the production of silver has been so enormous that now one ounce of gold is worth about twenty-three ounces of silver.

When it is remembered that nearly one-half of what the American farmer makes—for the average farmer earns no more than a living—is consumed in taxes, direct and indirect, it is wonderful that he is in distress? Is it strange that he is willing to try almost anything that promises relief? Is it not rather almost beyond belief that he has suffered in patience so long? Is it necessary to point out the remedy to the intelligent reader?

"The first destroyer of the liberties of a people is he who first gave them bounties and largesses."

M. B. MORTON.